

[I'm a cowgirl]

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Continuity, written

By Ruby Mosley

For Range-lore Volume

[Folkstuff - Range-Lore?]

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RANGELORE

"I'm a cowgirl, but I never could teach my husband to be a cowman," says Mrs. Ben McCulloch Earl Van Dorn Miskimon, of San Angelo, Texas.

"My father built the first frame house in Grayson County. I was born in 1862, at Whitesboro, Texas, in that little house. The very next year we moved to the country. My father being progressive, we had the first orchard in that area. We had a ranch of 1,000 acres on Red and Little Wichita Rivers, and six large farms. We also had access to the open range for cattle and horses to roam.

"One day during a round-up the cowboys found a fawn; It was so cunning they brought it to me. This was my favorite pet. I would sleep and eat with it. C12 - 2/11/41 - Texas 2 I was about eight years old, and we had great romps together. When spring came my fawn had grown and was very destructive to the orchard. One morning father said, 'Ben, I'd like to swap you out of that deer.' I said, 'What have you got?' He said, 'I'll trade you that little speckled heifer for him.' I agreed, of course, because I thought I would get to romp with the deer anyway, but no, father sent me away for a few days and when I returned; my deer

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had been killed and most of it eaten. The next morning I went out to the hay stack and my heifer had a little calf, the blackest little devil you ever saw. This was how I got my start in the cattle business.

"I was a fruit peddler, and I wasn't but nine years old either. Old Judge Harris was my helper. I would gather the fruit and carry it to the courthouse and he would help sell it. Can you imagine Judge Stovall (our present County Judge) even buying a peach from a little stringy head country girl, let alone help sell it?

"I kept saving my nickles and dimes and every time I got enough to buy a dogie, I bought, 'cause it took dogies to make cows. I just kept this up until I got a start.

"When I was a little girl about 12 years old, me and my sister were carring carrying about 400 dogies from Jack to Stvens Stevens County. We rode along and began to get hungry. In them days we had to find a place suitable to stop our cattle before we could stop and eat. We unmounted our ponies and 3 made a fire and put our coffee in a skillet to parch; it sure was smelling good, I heard a noise, looked up, and yelled, "Stampede." We sprang on our horses and galloped around and around until we got them under control. It was like the old tale, Gingham Dog and Calico Cat, there was no sign of fire, coffee nor skillet left. The remainder of the journey was very pleasant.

"I kept adding to my herd, riding the range, and cutting out cattle until I had a nice business. When I was seventeen years old, I bought and sold cattle like a man.

"Jim Loving was Secretary of the Cattle Association. He had a lot of friends and often gave entertainments. We would ride fifteen miles to his house to a dance. The fiddlers would get better all the time and many times we would gallop home in early morning.

"When I was nineteen years old I married W. A. Miskimon. I had property and cattle too. We lived in Jack County seventeen miles below Jacksborough. We had a mighty hard time, lots of cattle, and dry weather. My husband wasn't no cowman, I tried to teach him

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about cows but he never could learn, not even feed one. At last God gave me a boy. We would have to stay by ourselves on many instances. Once my husband went to Missouri on business. The severe drouth had caused all the water holes to sink and all wells to dry up. I strapped the baby on my back, papoose style, and would walk a mile or two for water. The wild hogs rooted in the low 4 places, and water would come up in small holes. With my baby on my back and a tea cup in my hand I would dip water here and there until I filled my buckets and carry the weary load home. The people of to-day demand water in the house or will not rent. I didn't stay out of the saddle long. I began riding the range again when my baby (papoose, I called him) was quite small.

"We started to Tom Green County, September 1, 1889. We had about 1,000 head of cattle and 300 head of horses. I had five cowboys to help, as I've said, my husband was no cowman, couldn't ride nor cut out cattle, so he wasn't much help. The boys laughed and told me they could track my route by my hair hanging on the bushes. I had rode through them Indian hills, corralling the wild mustangs to tame them. I tell people that's why my hair looks like this now. We got as far as Graham City when the rain poured down. We spent the night and went on alright. When we neared the Brazos River, I told my husband to see if the river was up too much to cross with the horses. He went and came back and told me to go see, since he didn't know nothing about cattle. I sent My husband on with the horses, he crossed and put them in the corral. Me and the boys were to hold the cattle. We drove then down to the river and camped with intentions of pushing them across the next morning. The cowboys were from the malarial country and when they got cold and wet they took chills. I got on my horse and logged the wood up, built a fire for the sick boys and made blankets 5 down, the poor boys with high fever and me with the cattle. That was one awful night, trying to hold the cattle all alone, with wolves howling and panthers screaming, and boys sick. I stayed on my horse, rounding the cattle, keeping them down. The boys were better next morning and we pushed the bellowing herd across the swollen stream. We came to a shack where my husband had camped. He was on the porch washing his face. We got breakfast ready and ate and stood around the fire until we dried out, as

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we were submerged in the Brazos. We continued our journey on to Tom Green County which was comprised of several counties then. We came to Red Creek which looked very desirable for camping. There was plenty of water and fresh fall grass.

“Mr. Miskimon's mother lived here and he went straight to visit her, leaving me and the boys again. He always trusted the boys with me, as a real cowboy can always be trusted under any circumstances. We herded the cattle on that area until the fence was built and ranching started. In the later latter part of 1889 we built the old ranch house that now stands on the corner of Randolph and First Street. I traded a little old red bull calf for that lot. I have the house divided off into two apartments, and it stays rented.

“Ranching business looked fine, my herd had increased so much and water was plentiful. I bought old man Seymour's cattle and horses in 1893. We had such a great herd I sure 'nough did have to ride, rope and cut out cattle, but they never got too tough for me. 6 “In 1894 a severe drouth came. Cattle were starving for water and food. They died by the hundreds each day. There was no rain for nine months. I knew something had to be done.

“I was pretty much of a business woman, as well as a cow puncher. I really had a credit rating with Dunn and Bradstreet, as good as gold. I wrote in and had supplies sent down to open a dress and [millineryshop?]. I got my goods on a ninety-day plan and I did a good business right where the Guaranty State Bank stands to-day. In those days we had certain restricted districts where the women were nor allowed on the streets.*

*Red light districts.

I managed to contact them with my little old, negro boy. He would take their orders. I would send pictures and scraps of material like my dresses were, and they would choose what

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they wanted. The negro boy would fill their order. They bought hats the same way, by pictures. Their money was as good as anyone else's and they had a lot more money. I kept the ranch out of debt and that was my motive.

"I sold my business, and had \$500.00 in cash and \$300.00 in merchandise that I sold to an Ozona merchant. The drouth was over, and our ranch out of debt. I went back to the ranch where I belonged, to roam and ride with the cows and horses. I never could teach my husband to be a cow man, and somebody had to. 7 "I had to go back to town (I operated the Old Nesbitt Hotel), my only daughter was born there. Again I was successful in business, came out with money. I'm a better business woman right now than most young people.

"I got our ranch business going pretty good again. My husband had to go away on business, and I donned my riding habit and went with him as far as Abilene to help get the horses started. It was late in the night when I got back and I was so tired I lay down on the porch to sleep. Bang! I heard a noise and got up and a man was trying to break in the back door. He knew my husband was gone. I rushed in and got my shot gun. I had no ammunition but bluffed the coward. I went through the house to the back door and knew the old sneak. At the point of my shot gun I told him to get going. He had driven his wagon near my house and put his little girl to sleep under the wagon. He rushed back and put the mules in a high lope. I told him if he stopped before I heard him cross the four-mile hill I would follow him and kill him. He really went on over the hill in a hurry. Ever afterward this same man never passed my house, but would circle away around, with his shot gun between his legs. He was never seen without that gun for fear my husband would kill him. Revealing his name now would startle the social public of to-day. The little girl that was under the wagon asleep is a very prominent woman of to-day. He also had a good wife that lives here now; that's why I have kept silent. 8 I must make this statement for the sake of our dear cowboys, the man who tried to attact me was not a cowboy, for any woman was as safe with the old time cowboy as she would have been with her brother.

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"After we got established again we began to gather stock around us. Our ranch was well known and we enjoyed helping cowboys; our house was always open to them. Boiled beef, red beans, and good black coffee brought many a cowboy our way. They showed their appreciation by rounding up my cattle any time they found them on the range, and returned them safely.

"I continued riding the range.. In that Seymour bunch I bought, I found a frisky little horse. I called him Ned. I put a hacka-more on his nose and mounted him. He made a paw at the sun and fell backward In the cow disposal that was about knee-deep. (It was easy to slide off at the side since I rode a side saddle). I did the same act three times and the fourth was a successful attempt. I rode old Ned until I thought he would fall for punishment. This really made a fine pony.

"We had another fine horse we called Silk Stockings, because of his nice stocking legs. The owner of his mother once said, 'She's as fine as split silk.' We watched this horse two or three years before I decided to ride him. I caught him and saddled him up. The cowboys held him while I climbed on. He bucked some but I rode him. His worst trouble was pawing and fighting when he was being saddled. 9 One morning I wanted to ride Silk Stockings. I knew I couldn't mount him by myself. I carried him to the wagon yard (Where Hemphill Wells now is) for the cowboys to hold while I mounted him.

"I was riding with my new side saddle, hand made, that cost me near a hundred dollars. When Silk [Stockingsleaped?] for one of the boys, he threw the hacka-more at him and it wrapped around my waist, just as I was trying to mount. Well that horse pitched me as high as the courthouse and ran through a fence. He tore my fine saddle into strings. From then on I rode a man's saddle. Now for the cows. The worst cow I ever saw, I had to milk her of course. (I was a little dare_devil). She was an old brindle cow and would hardly let me come near. I wore my old black bonnet and she hated it, I guess. I always had to tie it on to keep her from kicking it off. We finally sold that old heifer.

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"One day a great big black sow came to our house and I penned her. The next day she had 14 of the prettiest little pigs that ever was born. There was no such thing as advertising in the newspaper. We posted signs on the bulletin board in the lobby at the courthouse. Well I carried my sign and began getting results. Every day the ranch men would come. I would ask them if she was branded. "No," was their answers. I just said, 'Well she is still my sow and pigs.' The wealthiest oil man that Texas has produced was a poor man then and worked every trick possible 10 to get his paws on her. There are three of San Angelo's most prominent men that can tell you about this old sow. They tried to claim her.

"One day the owner finally came. Mr. Kirkendall rode up and said, 'Mrs. Ben, does that sow have a (K) on the right side?' I said, 'Yes.' Then he said, 'Let's look under her hide, and see if she has some buckshots, I had an old sow that looked like that and I shot her several times for eating chickens.' Sure enough, her hide was full of buckshots. He didn't want the sow but took two of the pigs and gave the remainder to me.

"I've had many trials and tribulations, but I own a good country home now and lots of chickens and stock, four lots in Westland Park,, and all the west end of block P, on West College Avenue. My one daughter, her husband, and children are here with me. I am about as happy as most people of my age. The general public knows me as "Flapper Fannie," as well as "Ben." I'm still working hard as a cow man for my husband, 'cause I've tried for 54 years to teach him, and he has never yet learned. He never will as long as my name is Ben McCulloch Earl Van Dorn Miskimon."